1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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628 ability to prosecute a feud and thereby to obtain redress by a life or by payment of cattle depends to some extent on the strength of a man's lineage and on his kin relationships. But the intensity of a feud and the difficulty of settling it depend chiefly on the size of the group concerned in it. If a man kills another who is closely related to him—his paternal cousin, for example—cattle are still paid, though fewer, probably about twenty head. One of the sources of contribution, the father's brothers, or their sons, would be the recipients of compensation and therefore cannot pay it. None the less some cattle have to be paid as it is necessary to compensate the family of the dead man, to provide the ghost with a wife, and to perform the due sacrifices. I was told that in such cases the matter is quickly settled. Probably a blood-feud can be settled more easily if it is within a clan, for Nuer consider it wrong for clansmen to engage in a feud. After payment has been made they say: 'The feud has been cut behind, we have returned to kinship.' It is also said that if there has been much intermarriage between two groups a feud is unlikely to develop.

When a man kills a fellow villager or a man of a nearby village with which his village has close social relations a feud is soon settled, because the people on both sides have got to mix and because there are sure to be between them many ties of kinship and affinity. It is pointed out to the ghost that cattle have been paid and that it is impossible to avenge him by taking life because no one would be left alive if the feud were continued between kinsmen and neighbours. Corporate life is incompatible with a state of feud. When a man spears another of a nearby 629 village it is customary for the people of the wounder's village to send the spear which caused the injury to the wounded man's people so that they can treat it magically to prevent the wound proving fatal. They also send a sheep for sacrifice. By so doing they intimate their hope that the wound will soon heal and that, in any case, they do not want to incur a feud on account of a personal quarrel. After this courtesy, even if the man dies his kinsmen are likely to accept compensation without great reluctance. If a man dies many years after having received a wound the death is attributed to this wound, but compensation is likely to be accepted without demur, and on a reduced scale.

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When a Nuer speaks of a person having stolen (*kwal*) an animal, he means that he has taken it without permission and by stealth and by no means implies that he ought not to have taken it. Within a tribe an abductor of cattle always considers that he is taking what is owing to him. It is a debt (*ngwal*) which he is settling in this way, because the man who owes him cattle has not repaid them of his own accord. The legal issue, therefore, is whether he is right in assuming a debt and whether he should have taken the particular animals he took. So well is this practice of helping yourself to what is owing to you an established habit, that it may be said to be a customary way of settling debts. Thus the final cattle of a homicide-payment are often seized in the pastures, and it often happens that when a bridegroom and his kin do not hand over all the cattle they have promised, the wife's brothers try to seize the animals still owing to them. In other circumstances a man will steal a cow which he is owed, sometimes employing the services of a magician to charm the owner so that he may not guard his herd on the day the theft is planned; for example a man who lent another an ox for sacrifice in sickness, at his daughter's wedding, in time of famine, and so on, and has not received a heifer in return, although the debtor possesses one. Having seized a cow from the debtor's herd he is quite willing to return it if he receives instead the heifer owing to him. The debtor will then either try to steal his cow back again or he will open a discussion which will result in his paying a heifer and receiving back his cow.

The only quarrels within a village or camp about ownership of cattle that I have witnessed have concerned obligations of kinship or affinity and have eventually been settled by one party giving way on account of his relationship to the other. If a man seizes cattle from a kinsman or neighbour he walks into his kraal and takes them. If the owner has a strong case he may resist: otherwise he lets the cattle go, for he knows that the man will be supported by public opinion in the community. If a man seizes cattle from a man of a different village he adopts different tactics. With one or two friends he watches the cattle in their grazing-ground till a suitable opportunity occurs. I have never heard of a Nuer stealing a cow from a fellow tribesman merely because he wanted one. He has, on the other hand, no hesitation in stealing cows from persons belonging to neighbouring tribes and will even go with friends to another tribe in order to steal from them. This theft (*kwal*) is not considered in any way wrong.

If a man commits adultery he pays an indemnity of five cows and an ox, unless the man is impotent, when the adulterer can

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damage he has caused. He seeks to justify it, so that a settlement is an adjustment between rival claims. I have been told by an officer with wide experience of Africans that Nuer defendants are remarkable in that they very seldom lie in cases brought before Government tribunals. They have no need to, since they are only anxious to justify the damage they have caused by showing that it is retaliation for damage the plaintiff has inflicted earlier.

IX

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Feuds are settled through the leopard-skin chief and he plays a minor role in the settlement of disputes other than homicide. It might be supposed that this functionary has a position of great authority, but this is not so. Indeed, on the same grounds as we have said that the Nuer have no law we might say that they also have no government. We devote a few lines to stating what are the ritual qualifications of the leopard-skin chief and then assess the part he plays in feuds and quarrels.

The few references in the writings of early travellers about Nuer leaders do not suggest that they were persons of very great authority.[1] The absence of any persons with sufficient authority or, except for a few prophets, with sufficient influence through whom an administrative system might be built up is stated in very direct terms by the earliest British officers to enter Nuerland.[2] The 'sheikhs' described in these early reports as lacking authority are probably the persons who were later known among Europeans as leopard-skin chiefs. A leopard-skin chief, *kuaar muon*, has a sacred association with the earth (*mun*) which gives him certain ritual powers in relation to it, including the power to bless or curse. However, lest it be supposed that the power to utter curses enables a chief to wield great authority I at once record that I have never observed a chief exercise this power. There are stories which recount the dire effects of a curse, but I think that as a rule a chief only ventures to threaten to utter one when he is officiating in a ritual capacity in the settlement of feuds, on which occasions he is expected to do so, the

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[1] Werne, op. cit., p. 207; Poncet, op. cit., p. 40; Brun-Rollet, op. cit., p. 222. Brun-Rollet's account is unacceptable.

[2] *Kaimakam G. Hawkes, S.I.R.*, no. 98, 1902; *Bimbashi H. Gordon, S.I.R.*, no. 107, 1903.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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threat forming part of the proceedings. Certainly to-day chiefs have no authority in virtue of their power of cursing. He is also known as *kuaar twac* because he alone wears a leopard-skin (*twac*) across his shoulders. A chief may be seen wearing one in Mr. Corfield's photograph on Plate XXIV. The word *kuaar* has ritual associations in all the Nilotic languages, but, without discussing further what word might best define its scope of reference in Nuer, we intend to refer to the person in this account, as we have done heretofore, as a chief, with the caution that we do not thereby imply that he has any secular authority, for we hold that his public acts are mainly ritual.

Nevertheless, his function is political, for relations between political groups are regulated through him, though he is not a political authority controlling them. His activities are chiefly concerned with settlement of blood-feuds, for a feud cannot be settled without his intervention, and his political significance lies in this fact. Chiefs sometimes prevent fights between communities by running between the two lines of combatants and hoeing up the earth here and there. The older men then try to restrain the youths and obtain a settlement of the dispute by discussion. However, we think that a fight can only be prevented in this way when the disputants are close neighbours and anxious not to kill one another.

Besides the part they play in feuds, chiefs perform ritual to cleanse parties to incestuous congress, and they possess slight rain-making powers, though Nuer do not attach much importance to the art. On the whole we may say that Nuer chiefs are sacred persons, but that their sacredness gives them no general authority outside specific social situations. I have never seen Nuer treat a chief with more respect than they treat other people or speak of them as persons of much importance. They regard them as agents through whom disputes of a certain kind can be settled and defilement of a certain kind can be effaced, and I have often heard remarks such as this: 'We took hold of them and gave them leopard skins and made them our chiefs to do the talking at sacrifices for homicide.' Their ritual sphere seldom extends beyond a tribal section.

Only certain lineages are chiefs and only some men of these lineages practise as such. It is, perhaps, significant that in many

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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Only if both parties want the affair settled can the chief intervene successfully. He is the machinery which enables groups to bring about a normal state of affairs when they desire to achieve this end. 624 628

It is true that a leopard-skin chief has always in these circumstances to persuade, by exhortations and threats, the kinsmen of the dead man to accept compensation, but this pressure must not be regarded as a command. It is quite clear from many Nuer statements on the matter that the chief's threats are encouraged to their furthest point in order that by yielding to his persuasion the kinsmen of the dead man may not dishonour themselves by neglecting to exact a life for the life of their kinsman.

> A chief's threats might go no further than saying that if the kinsmen would not listen to him neither would he, when they were in a similar difficulty, listen to them. But I was told that were the people to refuse mediation with undue obstinacy the chief might threaten to leave their homestead and to curse them. He would take an ox and rub its back with ashes and begin to address it, saying that if the injured party were to insist on revenge many of them would be killed in the endeavour and they would throw spears vainly at their enemies. I was told that he would then raise his spear to slaughter the animal, but this would be as far as people would care to let him go. Having asserted their pride of kin, one of the dead man's family would seize his upraised arm to prevent him from stabbing the ox, saying: 'No! Do not kill your ox. It is finished. We will accept compensation.' My informant, whose statements were supported by others, further added that if people were to insist on refusing the mediation of a leopard-skin chief he would take a short-horned ox and, after invoking God, slay it and rub the hairs off its head so that the members of the lineage who rejected his mediation might perish in prosecuting their feud. 624 628 189

We conclude, therefore, that a chief's curse is not in itself the real sanction of settlement, but is a conventional, ritual, operation in the settlement of feuds, which is known to every one in advance and is allowed for in their calculations. The threat of it is compelled by those on whom it would fall were it uttered. These affairs are like a game in which everybody knows the rules and the stages of development: when one is expected to give way, when to be firm, when to yield at the last moment, 624 628

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
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his maternal uncle—generally it would be the mother's uterine brother—for a bull-calf with the markings of the new ox-name he has taken. Though he cannot demand it as a right, he may curse his uncle's herd so that the male calves die if he is refused his request. It seems that the customary way of making this request is for the nephew to make an incision on the ear of the calf he desires. A man may not bury his maternal uncle, and I believe that a mother's brother should not bury his sister's son. Were a man to bury his maternal uncle he would die of *keth nara*, a disease which is said to cause white patches on the skin. The same disease may attack a man who hears that his maternal uncle has been wounded or cut himself severely and does not visit him and place some of the blood on his foot. Should the nephew not hear of the uncle's wound and contract the disease, he visits him and gets him to rub soot from the bottom of a pot on the affected surfaces. A man and his maternal uncle may not tether their cattle together in the same kraal, though the cattle may graze together. If one of the uncle's beasts dies the nephew may not skin it, for were he to do so he would destroy the uncle's herd and people would say that 'he had spilt the cattle of his uncle to the ground'. An uncle may not give his sister's son a spear-shaft, for the gift might cause him serious injury. A man and his sister's son must not use the same sleeping-hide or sleep in the same hut. These rules, especially those which forbid a man tethering his cattle in his uncle's kraal, skinning his uncle's beasts, and sleeping in the same hut as his uncle, seem almost designed to keep the two apart, to prevent a youth identifying himself with his maternal kin instead of with his paternal kin.

The maternal uncle is the kinsman who most often blesses a lad in the Nuer way of blessing, by spitting on the head. Grandparents may sometimes do this, but other relatives rarely. If a man comes frequently to visit his sister and partakes of her hospitality and does not occasionally spit on her child's head, the child may get the disease I have mentioned above. It is also said that when a maternal uncle rises during the day from a nap in the ashes of the hearth and his sister's son rubs the ashes off his back he must then spit on the lad's head. But if the blessing of a maternal uncle is desired, his curse is believed to be among the worst, if not the worst, a Nuer can receive, for, unlike the father, a maternal uncle may curse a youth's cattle, as well as his crops

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
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and fishing and hunting, if he is disobedient or refuses a request or in some other way offends him. The curse may also prevent the nephew from begetting male children. Nuer therefore, however angry they may be, avoid swearing at their maternal uncles: 'Above all you must not swear at your maternal uncle. You might even think of swearing at your father but never, never, at your maternal uncle.'

It is the privilege of a maternal uncle's wife to swear abusively at her husband's sister's son. She does this teasingly and not in anger. He will not answer her back unless he is of about her age. A mother's brother's wife is often addressed by the anomalous term '*mandong*', 'grandmother', though '*ma*', 'mother', may also be used. When so addressed she answers her husband's sister's son as '*gatnyimar*', 'son of my sister', or '*gatnyieti*', 'son of daughters', 'on account of her husband whose sister bore him', and not as 'grandson'. Nuer have given me two reasons for this usage. I was told that 'after the mother of your mother has died she (your maternal uncle's wife) turns herself into something like your grandmother'. This corresponds to a man calling his wife's elder sister 'mother' when his mother-in-law is dead and respecting her as a mother-in-law. I was also told that 'you call her (your maternal uncle's wife) *mandong* (grandmother) because if he (your maternal uncle) dies you may take his wife'. Though in my experience this seldom happens, the second explanation is consistent with another anomalous usage, the description by a woman of her husband's sister as '*mancoada*', which means literally 'mother of my husband', and of the son and daughter of her husband's sister as '*gatmancoada*' and '*nyamancoada*', 'my husband's mother's son' and 'my husband's mother's daughter'. In spite of these explanations it may be suggested that these peculiarities of behaviour and language relating to the maternal uncle's wife may be most appropriately interpreted in terms of the position of the maternal uncle in the kinship system.

The many observances relating to the mother's brother-sister's son relationship are indicative of this position, a further indication perhaps being the fact that, as will be seen in the following section, he alone among kinsfolk is not usually addressed by terms proper to the family. He is not, of course, strictly speaking a *gatnyiet* to his sister's son, but the relationship is one of this kind because his sister's children are *gaatnyiet* to him and his sons. Also in a

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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of the hooves which is often fatal. Another disease of unknown symptoms is *puc* (*puc nyacar, nyacar*). There is a disease called *kec* which is treated by the animals ears, and sometimes its horns also, being cut with a spear heated in the fire (*ba kec tem kä mac*). This sickness causes abscesses in the ears which are therefore scraped out. It also causes the horns to become hollow and if this is found to be the case the horns are either cut or bored. 232

Goats and sheep have their special diseases: *fanyuain*, probably sheep-pox, *wötcueny*, fluke, in which the liver and gall-bladder are enlarged and full of sores, etc. They also suffer from trypanosomiasis.

Jök is a generic name for all diseases of cattle, sheep and goats. The word may be incorporated from the Dinka and some expressions in which it figures, *e.g., jöndapuöth*, bovine pleural-pneumonia, show very clearly Dinka construction. The kind of *jök* which is afflicting the cattle is specified in the names of different diseases or in different names for the same disease, *e.g., jondapuoth, jöklace, jökdiu, jok nyantiel*, and *jok nyanjut*. Nuer appear to regard contagious diseases of cattle as spirits which suddenly come, for no apparent reason, as diseases of men come. Nuer say that they are spirits sent by God. They say " *Ce jok ben piny, caa kam piny e kuth*," " The disease has come to earth, it is brought to earth by God."

Besides veterinary medicines used to cure sickness, some of which may have therapeutic properties and be considered drugs, Nuer possess medicines which are used for other purposes than to cure sickness and we probably do not wrongly assess their value when we say it is purely of a magical order. Such are the medicines placed in churning gourds and churned with the milk to ensure a good supply of cheese. The roots of the following plants were recorded as having this use: *Cancan*, (*Trianthema pentandra*) *githlual, kuäk*. The seeds of a sweet smelling plant that grows on camp and village sites called *miëth* (*Ocimum americanum L.*), are boiled with the cheese to make it sweet and keep long. 232 789 251 789

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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232 Before a cow is taken to a bull to be served the root of a plant called *rinöm* (*Clitoria Tertnatea L.*) is chewed and blown up its nostrils to ensure conception. A plant called *när teyänga* (*wal thööra yang*) is given in an infusion to be swallowed by a cow which has aborted its calf. An infusion made from a plant called *tam kwir* is administered to cows which are milk-bound. An infusion from the *dep gany* plant is given to a cow which retains the afterbirth and an infusion from the stalks of the *cancan* creeper is given to a cow which refuses to suckle its calf.

Nuer love to hear their favourite oxen lowing and Mr. Corfield tells me that among the Eastern Jikany to induce an ox to low they take the feathers of the ground hornbill (*rumyuat*), a bird which has a deep-toned booming call, and after grinding them and mixing them with water, give them to their oxen to drink. Better still, if the whole bird can be obtained, its innards are used in this way instead of its feathers. Another bird used for the same purpose is the African cuckoo (*kwei bötbuöt*).

The usual ways of administering medicines to cattle are to give them in an infusion through the mouth or to chew them and blow them up the nostrils (*liang yang*).

[789] There are very few cattle medicines. Indeed, the Nuer, like other Nilotic peoples are very deficient in all forms of magic and in those situations where ritual is employed the ghosts or the spirits are invoked.

The only wounds of cattle which I have seen treated are broken horns. It sometimes happens that a cow or ox is horned by another in a byre and in turning to get out of the way it cracks its horns against one of the big trunks that support the roof of the byre and breaks one of them. Nuer fear lest the animal may die since there is rain everyday and, in the early part of the wet season, many flies. They cover the wound with *dil luak*, the brown sooty deposit which collects over the wood and thatch of byres when fires have burnt in them for some years.

835 with wives of kinsmen is regarded in a more or less serious light according to the kinship distance separating the two men; likewise with relations between a woman and two kinsmen or between a man and two kinswomen. Thus in a village in Lou country where I was living it was common knowledge that a man called Lum was having an affair with a woman who was described to me as his wife's sister, and when I expressed astonishment that he should dare to continue it I was told, 'It may be all right, she is only his wife's *nyagwanlen* (father's brother's daughter).' It remained to be seen whether there would be consequences or not. I was also told that even had the girl been his wife's *nyagwan* (paternal half-sister) nothing might happen, though the relations would without doubt be *rual*, and that the consequences would only be both certain and disastrous had she been his wife's *nyiman pany*, her true (uterine) sister.

835 To avoid the consequences of incest Nuer make sacrifices,
783 and the weight they attach to the breach of the taboo may be
●789 estimated by the value of the thing they sacrifice. For slight incest, as with a distant clanswoman or the wife of a paternal cousin, they consider it sufficient to sacrifice one of the yellow fruits I have spoken of earlier or one of the pendulous fruits of the sausage tree. When a yellow fruit is sacrificed it is cut in two and the left half, 'the bad half', is thrown away, while the contents of the right half, 'the good half', are drunk by the partners to the sin as an infusion. They may get a magician to do this for them or they may do it for themselves. When incest has taken place with the wife of a kinsman who is not a 'bull' and is in Nuer reckoning a close kinsman, the wife's sleeping-skin is cut in two. This, of course, would only be done if one of the pair were sick enough to be more frightened of death than of the husband, for unlike the cutting of the fruits the rite cannot be performed secretly. In cases of incest with a close kinswoman and in all cases of what the Nuer regard as really bad incest, *wal ruali*, an antidote some people are said to possess and make use of when committing a slight incest, is no protection and a vicarious sacrifice no remedy. A goat or a sheep, or in the most serious cases an ox, must be cut vertically in twain and a leopard-skin chief must perform the sacrifice. The guilty persons drink incest medicines infused in the gall of the sacrificed animal. It is believed that retribution follows swiftly on the heels of the offence, so that if sacrifice is to be of any avail it must be per-

7: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931-1936) 1949 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

formed at once. Nuer say that a sacrifice is unlikely to be efficacious when death is near and that it is little profit to make confession then.

The moral element in the retributive action which follows on a breach of the incest taboo is brought out by the fact that, except in cases of really bad incest, such as when a father and son have relations with the same woman, it is felt that no ill effects will follow an infraction if the incestuous pair were unaware that they were breaking it. It is common knowledge that children begin sexual play with kin and they are corrected if observed, but it is not thought that misfortune will follow, 'Because the children are ignorant of having done wrong'. I was told also that if two kinsmen have relations with the same girl unwittingly 'It is not *rual* because each was unaware that the other was making love to her', and again, that if a man has relations with a distant kinswoman, being ignorant of the kinship, 'This is not *rual* because he was unaware of the relationship between them.' Even in his own district a youth may not know the full range of his kinship, and if his father hears that he has taken a sweetheart who is distantly related to him he will tell him to break off the affair. Nuer were greatly amused when I asked them about incestuous relations among cattle and told me, perhaps not very seriously, that a cattle peg had in ancient days been cut in twain (*bak*) to make them innocuous.

If ignorance is regarded as an extenuating circumstance, the presence of children increases the danger. It is not thought that relations with a distant patrilineal cousin or with the wife of a father's brother in the classificatory sense will harm those who engage in them, but if the woman has children Nuer say: 'It (the *rual*) may leave you alone, but it will kill the children.' In the same way I was told in reference to the case, already cited, of Lum, who was having relations with his wife and his wife's paternal cousin at the same time: 'But she [the wife] has no child, so it is not *rual*.' If she had had a child the paternal cousin would have been the child's mother. In another case a man called Buk was having relations with a concubine in a neighbouring hamlet although his son, Bul, was married to the daughter of this concubine by another man. It was stressed by informants that Buk had not begotten a child by the concubine, for had he done so the child would have been *gat gwan*, father's son, to Bul, whose marriage, which had in any case not escaped

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

fertility. Moreover it is clear that those of the second category who acquire great prestige and influence often seek to misappropriate the functions and insignia of more reputable experts. There is a tendency to assume the leopard-skin. Deng Likea, Prophet of Gaawar, did so, and his son Gaw Bang—for many years President of the Bar Gaawar Court—often conducted the ritual of homicide although he had no traditional right to do so. Riak Loinyjok (mentioned above) wears the leopard-skin, though he would not be accepted as arbiter in blood-feuds. There is clearly a desire by these people to establish themselves in a ritual and traditional, and therefore more orthodox, status in society.

A *gwan kwoth* of repute will also claim that he possesses or is possessed by a large number of different spirits, not a single spirit. Deng Likea, whose principal spirit was called Diu, possessed many others, and he married a wife in the name of each. His sons are usually referred to first by their own names and then by the name of the spirit in whose name the mother of each was married, and not by that of their father, according to normal Nuer custom. Thus Deng Likea's sons were called Macar Diu, Gaw Bang, and so on.

There is a large number of different categories of spirit owners: owners of 'sky-spirits' (*kuth nial*), owners of 'spirits' of the wind (*kuth dange*), owners of 'earth spirits' (*kuth piny*) and 'talking medicines', these last being divided into a large variety of different forms, and finally, possessors of *wal*, medicine, which is usually present in more tangible form.

It is not within the scope of this book to describe at length the multitudinous concepts concerning *goah* and *kolangni*. *Goah* is said to be of Dinka origin, while *kolangni* are essentially Nuer. Under these two main headings are numerous spirits which have special names—*biel*, *maluth*, *gulung*, *mathiang*, &c.,—and special characteristics. The spirits are used to assist in the diagnosis of ills and misfortunes, the possessor acting as a medium and often going into a trance at a seance attended by a considerable number of people. The spirit is said to speak from the mouth of the medium, from a special pot or gourd, from the ground, or sometimes only through dreams.

Wal is a word which has the more literal meaning of medicine, since it is also applied to herbs, purges, and astringents as well as nowadays to medicines supplied by the government medical service. In this connexion it refers to magic roots and sometimes to other objects which have intrinsic magical power and which are operated by the performance of ritual for some specific purpose. There are different forms of *wal* (one called *nyeth*, for example, is believed to be particularly potent and also dangerous), but the Nuer do not consider themselves to be experts in their use, and regard them as being of foreign origin. In fact such roots are usually obtained from other tribes, and a Nuer will sometimes go on a special journey to purchase them.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

They can be and are used for beneficial purposes, but they are associated more often with the practice of witchcraft, and owners of such medicines are often greatly feared. This fear has perhaps been particularly impressed on the Nuer by the action of the Government in banning the possession of roots or medicines and inflicting severe penalties on their owners, whether they were believed to use them for good magic or for witchcraft. This reaction has not applied so much to the ownership of spirit medicines, presumably because, being for the most part entirely incorporeal, there was no proof of possession, and Government intervention was therefore much more difficult. Spirit medicines, *kolangni* and the like, can none the less be used for anti-social purposes, although they are normally regarded as beneficent and used as such.

A further category of Nuer magic experts is the *tiet*, who have special powers of divination,[1] but their techniques are not usually dependent on a particular spirit manifestation or on possession of a medicine. Their methods are more mundane in character, for they often use cowrie shells or pebbles, which are cast on the ground, and an interpretation is given of the formation in which they fall.

Beneficial and *Anti-social Activities*

We see, therefore, that the functions of all these experts are generally considered to be beneficial; those of the *ji twac* to the people as a whole; those of other experts or possessors of spirits and medicines to their individual clients. Their power can, however, be used for purely anti-social purposes. The *ji twac* have the power to curse by invoking the element or object with which they are particularly associated. We have seen that the Leopard-Skin Chief may call a curse upon those who refuse to listen to his exhortations in connexion with blood-feuds and homicide,[2] but he is not expected to do so for his own benefit or from personal animosity. Similarly the *twut ghok*, who has the power to benefit the people by ensuring the good health and fertility of their cattle, can also curse their cattle. Yet none of these religious functionaries can be regarded

[1] *Tiet:* a common Nilotic word used to cover a very large variety of magical experts.

[2] In connexion with warfare and cattle raids they are expected to work magic against other tribes; to make the infliction of wounds upon them easy; to destroy or weaken their defences. This is not witchcraft so far as the Nuer are concerned, for their action is pro-Nuer and to them in no sense anti-social. The definition of witchcraft is here relative. It will also apply to cases of warfare against other Nuer tribes or even tribal segments. An expert who performs ritual to bring about the downfall of enemies in another tribal section is acting in the interests of his own tribal section. His action is beneficial magic to his own people, black magic to those of the opposing segment, and there is no formalized community to which both belong and which would consciously react against his performance. His action is not witchcraft in the more exact definition of the term. Nefarious practices against an individual or even a kinship group within the community are a different matter, because there is a body of collective opinion which considers such action anti-social and, as we shall see in the next section, is prepared to take collective steps to remove the danger.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782 again. In what have we failed?' Then a cow is speared, and the chief continues praying: 'Oh God, take thy cow. And you [dead man] turn away, do not look at us again. We will give you your own things, but then leave us alone.' The wife of the deceased is now given to another male member of his family with these words: 'Bear children by her, that their fire may be raised up [that their family may not be extinguished], and their family may be able to manage their own affairs.'

A prayer by the chief for a woman in travail: 'God, what is it? why can the woman not bear? It is thou who has ordered the woman to bear children, that she may create descendants, that the man's family may be preserved.'

789 233 An important annual event is the bringing of the cattle across the river, where they find better pasturage. For this the help of the sorcerer is sought. He has to find a propitious day for the transaction and to perform the necessary magic rites. He spends the night before in making witchcraft, and the following morning he prays: 'Oh God, it is thou who said that I should be sorcerer, I should do witchcraft, I should bewitch the crocodile. The cattle has no more grass, let the cattle go across the river that they may graze on yonder shore. Oh God, it is thou who created the cow, that man might be nourished by her, let them swim safely across.' When the cows have been brought to the crossing-place, the sorcerer invokes the river or the spirit presiding over the river: 'Thou river of a certain man, let the cattle go across safely, all of them, let them reach the shore safely, let no one be touched by the crocodile. We are making a bargain.[2] As a ram is brought, he goes on saying: 'Take it, O river!' The ram's mouth is tied, so he goes to the river with it, and drives it into the water. Now the

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cattle are driven into the boats and they begin rowing them.

These are but a few glimpses into the religious life of the Nuer. The subject requires careful investigation based on a thorough knowledge of the language and can be carried out only by persons who have the confidence of the natives.

It is well worth while to win this confidence and to study the people intimately. They may at first sight not appear attractive and may not generally be inclined to look upon every white man as a higher being, but Miss Huffman is certainly right in saying that they improve on acquaintance; they reveal to him who lives and works among them noble qualities of which this book gives us some fine examples and which justify the labours of those who strive to help them in finding their way from the old, independent, and unfettered existence to changed conditions of life and to a new outlook.

The information given in this book will be welcome to scientists, but even more it will be of value to the growing number both of missionaries and of administrators who are coming into touch with the Neur.

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753 Sometimes if the mission clinic is near they hurry there at once for relief. At other times the usual form of relief is sought—a sacrifice must be offered so that the child may not be further harmed by the errant stranger.

751 843 An anklet or wristlet made of large wooden beads of a certain kind of wood will protect from cuts from grass, but a man whose wife is pregnant may wear either anklet or wristlet made of red and white or black and white beads in order to accomplish the same purpose.

● 789 The Nuer fears a curse. Indeed, many a mysterious, inexplicable wasting away has been caused by this deep-rooted fear.

A bunch of a certain kind of grass standing up in the yard near the door will keep harm away from any sick person within.

754 The evil eye is much feared. There seems to be no definite idea as to who has this evil eye. Every one but one's own relatives must be suspected of it until one is sure that they do not possess it. The evil eye is supposed to harm whatever it sees, if it be a sick person, a sore, or even a new-born baby.

The disease becomes worse, the sore refuses to heal. All such misfortunes are attributed to the influence of the evil eye.

Patients who have ulcers to be dressed at the clinic are anxious that there be no onlookers when the sores are uncovered.

When a scar is healed but the scar tissue remains red, they plead piteously for a bandage so that they may keep it protected from the evil eye.

NUER LAW AND THE MORAL CODE

000 It is needless to say that Nuer law and their moral code are entirely different from that of our western world.

Cien

753 775 *Cien* is the vengeance wrought by a ghost which produces sickness and misfortune; like the other Nilotic tribal groups, the Nuer hold the concept of *cien*, and believe that ghostly vengeance will fall on those who have wronged a man and allowed him to die with a grudge. Fear of *cien* tends to make a Nuer more careful to treat others with justice.

[782] To stop the effects of *cien* it is necessary to make a sacrifice to god in the sky and, when possible, to make reparation.

NUER CURSES AND GHOSTLY VENGEANCE

789 Curses are uttered by someone who has been wronged. The efficacy of a curse is largely conditioned by the relationship of the curser to the cursed. The Nuer regard the curse of a mother or father as serious; it may result in death. The curse of a mother's brother is feared because, being of a different lineage, he may curse cattle, which is the worst of all curses in the eyes of the Nuer. The curse of an eldest child is feared by the mother and maternal uncle.

There are other curses imposed by those of the *ric* (age-set), by the leopard-skin chief, the man of the cattle and *guk*, the prophet.(1) The Nuer also believe in conditional curses which may be laid on a man and become operative if he, or any of his descendants, should do a certain thing.

RITUAL PERSONS

791 There are several ritual figures among the Nuer who are important in the village community.

1. *The Leopard-Skin Chiefs.* They have a special relationship with the earth and can affect the welfare of the crops. They also have a limited role in rain-making and in the general regulation of the weather. They conduct the rituals concerned with homicide, with cleansing the parties to incestuous relations, with preventing feuds, and protecting warriors on raiding expeditions.

2. *The Nut Ghok.* Members of certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle; they are asked to cure cows of various diseases and to ensure the fertility of barren animals. Their role is, however, a more restricted one than that of the leopard-skin chief, who has functions relating to social as well as to natural processes. Usually the *nut ghok* is a member of a stranger lineage, as is the leopard-skin chief, and this is presumably an advantage when they have to mediate between powerful and antagonistic lineages.

3. *Totemic Experts.* There are a number of totemic experts whose ritual connections with lions, crocodiles, and other dangerous creatures, enable them to influence the beasts' behaviour to the advantage of the community. A totemic specialist is the possessor of the spirit of his totem; he has no political significance.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Africa*, 1949, XIX, p.289.

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assured by old men when about to wade through crocodile-infested streams that I need have no fear, because people whose totem was the crocodile lived nearby, and they contrasted the benevolence of their local crocodiles with the savagery of crocodiles in other districts. When once I remarked to a Nuer about a man fishing far out in the Sobat river, in a place I knew to be infested with crocodiles, that I thought he was taking a big risk, my companion simply replied 'maybe he respects crocodiles'. I have also been told that men of these lineages call the reptiles out of the water and stroke them. There can be no doubt that people who have the crocodile for totem are regarded by other Nuer as having some control over them. They are summoned by their neighbours to perform a rite to prevent crocodiles from attacking them or their flocks and herds when streams and rivers must be crossed. The *gwan kwoth nyanga*, the person who possesses the crocodile-spirit (who has the crocodile for totem), bends a metal bracelet till the ends overlap and binds them in this position with grass, and then presses the bracelet into the river mud, calling on *gwandong*, grandfather or ancestor (in this context, the crocodile-spirit), to let the people pass over in safety. This operation closes the jaws of the crocodiles while people and cattle are in the water. He may also, on certain occasions, as when a stream is being fished, bind a goat and push it under weeds and reeds into the stream for the crocodile-spirit at the same time as performing the bracelet rite; and it is said that he must then sit on the bank and abstain from drinking water while people are still in the stream.

A large number of small lineages in Nuerland respect snakes. All those whose descent I was able to trace are of Dinka origin. Some respect *nyal*, the python. Those I have asked about their totemic affiliation have told me that a python was born as twin to their ancestor. When they sacrifice to the python-spirit they take a goat to the edge of the stream and there kill it, in imitation of the python's killing of its prey, by blocking its mouth and nostrils and bouncing on its belly till it suffocates. They throw a piece of the sacrificial meat into the stream and another piece towards the land. They boil the rest of the meat, taking care that no soup of the boiling is spilt, and eat it. A senior man then sharpens a new cattle-peg and, after driving it into the ground and winding grass round it, pours some of the blood of the goat at its foot, asking the python-spirit to take its 'cow' and let the

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for totem must not do so lest he cause the birds to devour the crop.

Plants are respected by some lineages. They may not cut them or burn their wood. The large Gaanwar clan respect the *nyuot*-tree (*Cordia Rothii*) and the *koat*, tamarind, tree. The ancestor of this clan fell from heaven holding a branch of the *nyuot*-tree in his hand or, some say, he descended from heaven by, or on to, a *nyuot* near which was a small tamarind.[1] Members of this clan call for aid on *kwoth nyota* or *kwoth kota*, the spirit of these trees. The *nyuot*, a branch of which is often erected in the homes of Gaanwar as a shrine to this spirit, is associated with rain on account of the humidity of its leaves even in the dry season. The verbal form of the word, *nyot*, means 'to drizzle'. Members of the clan may therefore be called on to bring rain in time of drought. This they do by placing a sprig of the tree in water, sacrificing an animal, and calling on the spirit of the clan, which is the spirit of the tree, for rain. It is, we may suppose, on account of their connexion with water that the clan have as additional totems the waterbuck and the fish *nyiwar*, *cur*, *lam*, *yiau*, and *gwejual* and can also speak of their spirit as '*kwoth puoara*', 'spirit of our waterbuck', '*kwoth lameda*', 'spirit of our *lam* fish', and so on. I have been told that women of this clan will not eat the meat of a cow which has died calving, but I do not know the reason for this abstention. The scattered Jwal clan share some of the Gaanwar totems. They seem at one time to have formed a single clan with the Gaanwar. The Jingop and Keunyang lineages of western Nuerland respect the *ngop* tree, the sycamore or wild fig (*Ficus Sycomorus*), and speak of '*kwoth ngoapna*', 'spirit of our fig-tree', to which they dedicate cows in their kraals, as is usual where there is a totemic relationship. The largest clan in Nuerland, the Gaatgankir of the Jikany tribes, respect gourds. Their ancestor was found in a gourd (*kir*). They will not cut or step over the stems of gourds or prepare them to serve as utensils, for they must not handle a gourd which still contains its pulp and seed. Nevertheless they use them as utensils for the same purposes as do other Nuer. The clan is of Dinka origin, though it now counts as a Nuer clan. Other plants respected by lineages, usually of Dinka descent,

[1] Some variants of the story of his appearance on earth are recorded in *The Nuer*, p. 230.

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778 Indeed, the fetishes seem only to have been placed in the category of Spirit by the logical necessity of assimilating the powers attributed to them to some model the Nuer already possessed. They are also of the category of *wal*, medicines, which sharply differentiates them from Spirit proper, but since they can reveal their wants and wishes in speech, move about, and kill people, they seem to Nuer to fall between the two categories. It is to be remarked that the *kulangni* and the *bieli*, which are closer to totemic representations of Spirit, are generally referred to by these names and not, like the totemic spirits, as *kuth*, as though by distinction of name they were being marked off from the other spirits. It should be stressed also, in this connexion, that the fetishes, and to some extent the nature sprites, are spoken of in the plural, as when we speak of angels, devils, goblins, and fairies, showing that they are conceived of as having less individuality than other spirits.

789 It remains only to say a few words about medicines which do not talk, the ordinary *wal*, magical substances which have an efficacy in themselves and do not derive their power from Spirit. Coming to the Nuer from Zandeland, where everyone is a magician and medicines are legion and in daily use, I was at once struck by their negligible quantity and importance in Nuerland, and further experience confirmed my first impression. I mention them chiefly for the reason that their rarity and unimportance are highly indicative of the orientation of Nuer thought, which is always towards Spirit.

789 In speaking of Nuer magic we are faced with the same historical problem that I have mentioned earlier, for all Nuer with whom 177 I have spoken on the subject have said that medicines were almost entirely lacking—only a few are thought to be old—in the days of their fathers and that most of the few medicines they now possess have been taken over from neighbouring peoples. My own view is that ethnological evidences support their statements, but the point that is important for us here is rather that Nuer regard medicines as something foreign and strange. They think easily in terms of Spirit but not in terms of medicines, the idea of which as it obtains among their Sudanic neighbours they seem scarcely able to grasp.

789 Nuer medicines of today are mostly of the nature of talismans 755 for fortune—in hunting, fishing, courting, and travelling. I did not find that Nuer had much faith in them. Medicines are also

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used, sometimes as infusions, to protect a person from, or cure him of, sickness brought about by breach of an interdiction. There are also medicines, or people say there are, against the evil eye, monorchids, children conceived by suckling mothers, and fetishes. Nuer also have a few simples for treating common ailments, such as constipation, throat and lung complaints, fevers, and swellings, and for treating sick cattle. These medicines are thought to be efficacious only in very small matters or as secondary to the performance of a religious rite. No *wal* is of any use, at any rate by itself, as protection against the consequences of a serious breach of an interdiction or in any violent sickness. Only prayer and sacrifice are then of avail; and this holds, Nuer who know anything about them think, for European medicines—quinine, for example, as well as for their own.

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III

When a ghost comes to trouble the living it is said to *cien* them. 775
It is useful to discuss this concept in the light of another, that of 789
biit, to curse,[1] because the two are closely connected, the ability of a ghost to harm being the *post mortem* operation of the projective power of the psyche, the power to harm another through the mind and the heart.

The curse of certain persons in Nuer society is believed to be 789
effective if they have been wronged. If they utter curses without due cause (*cuong*) the curses will either be ineffective or harm the speakers of them. A man curses another by uttering an invocation (*lam*)—which in this context is an imprecation—over, or about, him; and Nuer distinguish different kinds of curse by reference to the relationship of the persons implicated in it—*biit gwan*, the curse of a father, *biit nara*, the curse of a maternal uncle, *biit kuaara*, the curse of a leopard-skin priest, and so forth. Some of these curses are regarded as weightier than others.

The curse of father or mother is serious. A man may curse his 789
son for constant disobedience and for meanness, especially for 593
refusing him meat. Indeed, any old man may curse a youth for [561]
refusing him food, because both in a general sense and in terms of the age-set system all youths are sons to the aged, but his curse would not be as weighty as that of the true father. 'A father's curse is to hunting, to fishing, and to hoeing, but he will not curse him (his son) to cattle.' The youth may then miss his mark in hunting, fishing, and war, and his crops may fail. He may also injure himself in these occupations, or suffer one of the many possible misfortunes that beset a traveller, both in the literal sense of mishaps to one on a journey and in the figurative sense of evils that face a man on his journey through life, which the Nuer, who have a liking for meiosis, speak of collectively as 'thorns'. At its worst the curse of a father or mother may be a *biit liagh*, a curse which results in death. However, 'a father will not curse his son to cattle', because the cattle belong to the lineage and if he caused them to die he would only be harming himself and his kinsmen and ancestors.

[1] A *biit* is a curse in the sense of consigning a person to misfortune and not in the sense of swearing at a person, which is *kwith* or, where there is a joking relationship, *leng*.

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789 593 A mother may curse her son for neglect, especially when she is old and must rely on others for support, or for divulging her hiding-place to her husband if he is angry with her and seeks for her to chastise her. A mother's curse may have the same effects as a father's curse; but it is thought that, in addition, it has the particular effect of preventing the son from begetting male children. A mother's curse may thus injure the lineage, and in this respect her curse is more like that of the mother's brother than that of the father. I have also been told that a mother may, because she loves a son who has wandered to a distant country, curse him mildly so that he may suffer some minor sickness which will put him in memory of his home and cause him to return to it.

789 604 The curse of a mother's brother—at any rate that of a mother's uterine brother—is also greatly feared by Nuer, for he, unlike the father, may curse a man 'to cattle', so that he loses his entire herd. Nuer seem to regard it as the worst of all curses and they recognize it as a strong sanction behind the demands of their mothers' brothers, where these are just. A sister's son who fails to carry out [753] certain duties or who fails to observe certain interdictions concerning his mother's brother may develop a disease called *keth nara* (disease of the *nar*, mother's brother), which may be fatal. Nuer describe it as *'cere ke biit'*, 'like to a curse'. People say that [603] the curses of father, mother, and mother's brother are the worst, though that of a paternal grandmother is also said to be bad, and [593] it is said that the curse of an eldest child is feared by his parents, especially his mother, and by his maternal uncle; in certain circumstances a sister's son, especially the eldest son of the sister, may curse his maternal uncle's herd. The only other kinsfolk of whom I have been specifically told that they may curse a man, in the sense that one may speak of a curse of the kinship category in which they stand, are the father's sister and the mother's sister, and Nuer say that these are very small curses and they do not therefore give them much thought; but a person standing in any social relationship to another may curse him if he has been wronged by him. However, the more distant the relationship the less effective the curse, because the less the obligation and therefore the less the wrong.

789 593 A run of misfortunes may be attributed to the curse of one of these relatives. I tell one story in illustration. Luak, a man of the Leek tribe, refused to stay at home and help his father Thicjok to

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herd the cattle and hoe the gardens, but spent his time attending dances and courting girls. He wandered about the country having a good time, and when he returned home it was only for a meal. He would be off again next morning. One day his father, in exasperation, cursed him, saying that he would never have a wife and children and would live to a great age to lament that he had no sons of his own in whom he would be remembered but only children he had begotten by the wives of other men. So it happened. Luak never married, though he begat two sons by a widow-concubine. When he died he left ten head of cattle with instructions that Dol, the second of his natural sons, was to marry with them a wife to his name, so that he might have sons called after him. That year all the ten animals died of rinderpest; so that people said that the curse on Luak went on acting after his death. The father's curse was here not in the first instance 'to cattle' but 'to sons', although in the sequel its purpose could only be achieved by the death of the cattle. Dol told me that, as he has now enough cattle, he would like to marry a wife to his genitor's name but fears to take steps to do so lest the cattle die. He had decided that it would be prudent to marry first a wife for himself and then, if ever he has again enough cattle, to make a second marriage in the name of his natural father.

Other specified curses among the Nuer are those of the *ric*, the age-set, and of certain religious personalities, the *kuaar muon*, the priest of the earth (the leopard-skin priest), the *wut ghok*, the man of the cattle, and the *guk*, the prophet (Chapter XII). If a man wrongs a member of his age-set, as by committing adultery with his wife or by not assisting him when attacked by strangers or when wounded, the wronged man may utter an imprecation, saying 'as if we did not look at this sun together' (when lying on their backs awaiting the cutting of the marks of manhood on their foreheads), and Nuer told me that it may well have lethal consequences. A leopard-skin priest can curse a man who obstructs him in the exercise of his functions as peacemaker in fighting and feud. On account of his mystical connexion with the earth his curse is believed to be particularly harmful to the crops, though it may cause other misfortunes as well. In his imprecation he may forbid the man he curses to plant in his earth and tell him to beget his children in the tree-tops and herd his cattle in the sky. The *wut ghok* has ritual functions in connexion with cattle and his

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789 curse is said to be feared because it may injure the cherished herds. It may also cause a man diarrhoea whenever he drinks milk. Much of the influence exercised by the Nuer prophets who were so prominent in recent times was due to the fear their curses inspired.

789 773 A *biit*, in a conditional form, is often cited by Nuer as a mythological explanation of some custom. Somebody in past times cursed certain persons if ever they or their descendants should do certain things. I give a few examples. A member of the aristocratic lineage of the Karlual section of the Leek tribe will not live in the country of the Lang tribe. The explanation is that once upon a time a Karlual aristocrat and a Lang aristocrat together speared a buffalo, which charged and knocked down the Lang man and began to worry him. He called out to the Karlual man to spear the animal again, but the Karlual man did not do so, fearing that he might injure his companion. Before Lang (tribes are personified in myths) died he cursed Karlual, saying that if ever a member of the dominant clan of Karlual settled in Lang country he would die. Another story is about the Riaagh lineage, who are a branch of the Keunyang lineage, the dominant lineage in the Karlual country referred to in the story I have just related. It concerns their relations with the Ngwol lineage of the same tribal section who are said to be descended from a man of this name who was a foundling adopted by Keunyang. Riaagh had a newborn child and the mother was so busy looking after it that she often let her fire out and rekindled it by borrowing a brand from the fire of Ngwol's wife. One day Ngwol fell sick with smallpox and sent word to Riaagh that his wife was not to come to his home again for fire as he was ill. Riaagh did not believe him and sent his wife again to borrow fire. A fight ensued and Ngwol killed Riaagh. Riaagh's mother then uttered a curse, saying that the descendants of Ngwol would suffer misfortune if ever they were to eat out of the same pot as the descendants of Riaagh or to sit near their cooking-pots. If today a Ngwol man sits near a Riaagh pot there will be a quarrel. The Keunyang lineage figures in another myth of this kind. If a man of this lineage crosses the Gazelle river to settle among the collateral lineages of Deng and Cuaagh, or a member of either of these two lineages crosses the river to settle among the Keunyang, the settler builds his byre without an entrance of the usual form. This custom is said to date from the time when the Deng and Cuaagh lineages first crossed the river to settle

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to the north of it, leaving the Keunyang in what had been their common home to the south of it. Quarrels ensued and Keunyang uttered a *biit* making it a condition of any future settlement. Yet another story relates how Jwal and Gaawar (clans, like tribes, are personified in myths) went fishing together. Jwal lacked a pot in which to cook his catch and he asked Gaawar to lend him his pot, but Gaawar refused, so Jwal had to do the best he could with a gourd plastered with mud. To mark this meanness he uttered a *biit* saying that if a member of either clan were to take shelter during rain under the same roof as a member of the other clan lightning would destroy them both. I have heard people shout to a member of one of these clans who had entered a hut for shelter from a storm to get out as there was a member of the other clan present. This story may be connected with the association of the Gaawar clan with sky and rain. There are a number of such stories relating to inter-clan relations which probably mirror actual or historical local and political interrelations which lie outside the present discussion.

A *biit* of a rather different kind is that relating to certain girls called *kuony*, who are said to be dangerous to their husbands. It is said that a girl of this name was affianced by her brothers to a man with some unpleasant complaint. She refused to marry him and was often beaten by her brothers on this score, because the man had many cattle. Eventually she gave way and married him, but then she refused to cohabit with him. Her husband eventually died of his complaint and the girl was left alone in his home, and lions and hyenas came by night and ate the cattle and beasts of the flock, as there was no man in the home to defend it. So she uttered a curse over her kinsmen, saying that in future daughters of their lineage would always bring death to their husbands. I have met *kuony* girls in western Nuerland, where it was pointed out to me that their husbands, as I could see for myself, had died young. However, this does not seem to prevent men from marrying them, and I was told that they are regarded as unusually attractive.

There are also many examples of a *biit* in Nuer just-so stories explaining how animals acquired their characteristics and habits. The giraffe has what looks like a hollow in the top of its head. When his mother died giraffe asked shrewmouse to lend him a hoe to dig a grave in the earth to bury her, but as shrewmouse

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789 538 refused to let him have a hoe he had to bury her in his head. As a result of this incident giraffe and shrewmouse uttered conditional curses, giraffe saying that if ever a shrewmouse crossed a path he would die, and shrewmouse saying that if ever a giraffe ate grass he would die. This is why one never sees a shrewmouse on a path unless it be dead,[1] and why one never sees a giraffe eating grass, only the leaves of trees. The mother of goat, in another story, borrowed a knife from the mother of hyena and lost it. The mother of hyena cursed her, saying that in future her descendants would eat goats wherever they found them. This is the reason why goats are always pawing the ground. They are still looking for the lost knife of the mother of hyena. Another story relates how man lent his running-powers to ostrich and ostrich refused to return them. It is because man then cursed the race of ostriches that today men sometimes hunt them for their feathers and lions kill them for meat. Shoebills eat fish and blue herons eat frogs and other small creatures of marsh and shallows. The reason for this is that *bany*, the shoebill, and *ngok*, the blue heron, were sons of one father and because *ngok* neglected an uncle's duties to *bany*'s children when their father died, *bany*'s mother cursed him and his descendants. Yet another of many such stories relates how the village mouse, after having taught men how to beget children, taught women how to bear them. In return for this service woman uttered a *biit*, saying that village mice would share the food of the home with its mistress. This last story introduces us to a further sense of the word *biit*, an invocation which is a blessing and not a curse; for a man can *biit* a person to good fortune, as woman did in the case of mouse, instead of to bad fortune. In my experience this sense is rare.

789 626 The curse is undoubtedly a powerful sanction of conduct, largely because it is not thought necessary that a wronged man should utter it aloud for misfortune to follow. He has only to think it. Such an unspoken curse Nuer call a *biit loac*, a curse of the heart. Indeed, it would seem that he need not expressly formulate a curse in his mind at all, a mere feeling of resentment arising from a genuine grievance being sufficient to cause injury to the person who occasioned it. Thus I was told that if a man is killed by his wife's brother and the wife laments his death, her sorrow and sighs are themselves a kind of *biit*. God hears them and will cause

[1] Cf. the old belief in England that a shrew cannot cross a footpath and live.

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the slayer to become a wanderer on the face of the earth and to die in the midst of his wanderings. He becomes one of the *jibiet*, the cursed ones, and what Nuer also call a *gwan giakni*, a man possessed by evil. An action by itself may bear evil fruit without anyone saying or doing anything to make it bear. Nuer say that 'it is like a *biit*'. A man who kills another finds all the strength gone out of him. The infringement of a religious interdiction carries its own penalty, for the interdiction is 'like a *biit*'. For example, misfortune will fall, if only in that the cuts of manhood on his brow will not cicatrize, on a lad who during the period of seclusion after initiation has contact with the cattle.

Though the word *biit* may not often be used with the sense of blessing it is sometimes so used, and as the idea of blessing has some importance in Nuer thought a few words may be devoted to it before making some concluding remarks about curses.[1] An older person blesses a younger one by spitting on his head. The spittle (*ruei*) has, as in other parts of Africa, a special virtue and is said to benefit the *yiegh*, the life, of the person who receives it. I was told that this is particularly done by a man's parents when he returns from a long journey, and one man said that it is then done so that the ghosts, who may have forgotten their kinsman, may know him again. A mother also blesses a son about to set out on a long journey by taking his middle finger in her hand, spitting on him, and saying something like 'friend, my son, you will journey on this earth, you will go round [avoid] all thorns [troubles]'. She may also take some soot from the bottom of a pot and mix it with butter and daub this paste on the soles of his feet, under the knees, and on thighs, chest, and head. Spitting figures as a blessing in various other contexts. If a woman does not conceive, her father's kin spit into a gourd and rub her belly with the spittle, asking God that she may conceive. If she does so, the child may be named *Ruei*, Spittle, or *Nyaruea*, Daughter of Spittle. The spittle of a prophet is considered to be especially efficacious in curing barrenness. When a leopard-skin priest arbitrates between two parties and gives a decision in favour of one of them, that man may hand his spear to the priest,

[1] Another word which sometimes has the sense of blessing is *puth*, but, though it sometimes has this sense, it is most commonly used in reference to the making of a gift to in-laws and is then, as in most other contexts, best translated 'to honour'.

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789 827 who returns it to him after having first spat on it. When a father has agreed to his son's initiation the boy goes to a member of his father's age-set and this man plucks out a tuft of the boy's hair, spits on it, and brushes it against the boy's face and head. This is the blessing of the father's age-set. A leech massages a sick person with his spittle. Mr. B. A. Lewis records that when the Gaawar tribe chose a certain Bwoogh Kerpel to lead them across the Nile to conquer fresh lands from the Dinka the people lifted him on high so that God might see that he had been chosen, and they gave him a gourdful of milk to drink into which they had all spat.[1] In all these examples—and others could be given—there is the idea of blessing. However, a blessing can be given without spitting. Any person can bless another (pp. 16–17), but the blessings of those whose curses are most effective are also the most effective.

789 776 It is important to note that, as with curses, blessings are thought to be effective only because God makes them so. Just as a curse is an imprecatory prayer (for if God is not formally addressed in it it is understood that it is his affair), so a prayer is implied in a blessing. It is a benedictory prayer. Hence (and here again as with curses), a man can be aided merely by a person thinking well of him, bearing him in sweet recollection (*tim*) without formally blessing him. He blesses him in his heart, and just as God sees a man's just resentment for a wrong and the resentment then has the force of a curse, so he sees the love and the love has then the force of a blessing. So when a Nuer says '*ba ji tiem*', 'I will think of you', he means that he will think fondly of you and so blesses you. A good action in itself may bring fortune to a man. God sees it and it becomes, Nuer say, like a *biit* for good, just as he sees a bad action and it becomes a *biit* for ill.

789 776 626 The religious significance of cursing and blessing lies in a dominant motif of Nuer religion, that of *cuong* in opposition to *duer*, right in opposition to wrong. A person's curse of another is only effective if he is in the right and the other is in the wrong. There must have been damage or negligence, and in Nuer reckoning this implies a social relationship of some kind between the two persons, such as, in fact, is bound to exist between any persons so involved in Nuer society. It is when the obligations of a relationship have not been observed that a curse can act, its effectiveness increasing with the closeness or social significance of the relation-

[1] B. A. Lewis, 'Nuer Spokesmen', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1951, p. 81.

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ship; and it can be quieted by reparation to the wronged person. In an account of Nuer religion what is here important is that the curse is only effective, Nuer say, because God sees that one man has right and the other wrong and allows it to act. It seems to the observer therefore that the curse, like the blessing, has its own psychic power, but that Nuer relate it to a set of moral rules of which God is conceived of as guardian and judge. The power of a curse or a blessing thus lies ultimately not with man, who is only the medium, but with God. God's role is not merely permissive, for, as we have noted, a wrong itself may, through the sufferings and lamentations of the wronged persons, bring retribution to the wrongdoers without their taking any action in the matter themselves. This is why also Nuer say of the infringement of a religious interdiction, in which no immediate question of wrong to another may arise, that it has a certain similarity to a *biit*. Formally the two ideas are quite distinct, and Nuer see a similarity between them only because in both cases there is a fault which is punished by God, in the first case indirectly and in the second directly. Consequently we are once again faced with the Nuer idea of faults, which necessitates a fuller discussion than I have so far given to it but which is also more appropriately treated separately in the next chapter.

The concept of *cien*, to which I now turn, has certain similarities to that of *biit*, especially to the silent curse, 'the curse of the heart'. Nuer think that it bodes ill for those who have wronged a man if he dies with resentment in his heart, for he will then take ghostly vengeance on them from the grave.

The word *cien* is found in one form or another, and with common elements of meaning, in all the Nilotic languages. In Nuer it means the vengeance, generally producing sickness or other misfortune ending in death, taken by an aggrieved ghost on the living, and in its verbal form the taking of such vengeance. Nuer regard it as a most serious matter if a man dies with a legitimate grievance in his heart, for while it may be possible to make amends to a living man for a wrong done to him and thereby rid oneself of his *biit*, it is often impossible to make peace with the dead. Fear of *cien* undoubtedly, if we are to believe what Nuer say, makes them avoid, at any rate sometimes, persistently denying men justice lest they take their wrongs to the grave and from there seek settlement.

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835 use the word *rual* for incestuous relations, and it can also be used
783 for the consequences of them. These, generally certain forms of yaws or syphilis, though they may be any kind of misfortune, are more or less grave according to the closeness of the relationship between the persons concerned. Nuer think that if they are very closely related death may follow, possibly within a few days, while if they are very distantly related nothing untoward may happen. In cases of serious incest the penalty may fall not only on the partners to the offence but also on their nearest relatives, particularly on their children. The greater the danger of punishment the more likely and the more expeditiously will the act be followed by sacrifice and the more valuable will be the thing sacrificed. When the incest is considered to be very slight, what Nuer call a *rual ma*
[789] *tot*, small incest, *wal ruali*, incest medicine, an antidote which some people are said to possess, may be thought adequate protection, and if it is deemed wise to make sacrifice, a cucumber or a pendulous fruit of the sausage tree is considered a sufficient offering. When the offering is a cucumber it is cut in two and then the left half is thrown away and the contents of the right half are squeezed into water and drunk by the partners to the act. If the fruit of the sausage tree is the offering it also is cut in two. I have several times seen youths in western Nuerland, where this tree is commoner than to the east of the Nile, cutting down its fruits for the purpose, and it is interesting to note that the Dinka call the tree *rual*, the Nuer word for incest. If there is incest with the wife of a close kinsman her sleeping-hide may be cut in two. In cases of major incest the antidote is not thought to be sufficient protection, nor a vegetable offering a sufficient sacrifice, and a goat or sheep, and in the most serious cases an ox, must be sacrificed without delay, and a leopard-skin priest should conduct the ceremony. The beast is slaughtered by being cut vertically in twain from head to tail, and afterwards the guilty persons drink incest medicine infused in the gall of the victim. All these cuttings are spoken about as *bakene rual*, the cutting, or splitting, in two of the incest.

835 One hears much about incest among the Nuer, and sacrifices to cleanse parties to it are frequent. One reason for this is that the prohibition on sexual congress covers a very wide area of social relationships. The more important categories covered by it are clanship, close cognation, close natural kinship, close kinship

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Nuer have said in sacrifices or about them I have preserved their sacrificial idiom. It must be understood, therefore, that in this context the word 'cow' seldom refers to a cow but almost always, when the victim is an animal, to an ox, a wether, or a castrated he-goat. In a sacrificial context Nuer also always speak of a cucumber-victim as '*yang*', 'cow'.

Should for some reason no beast be available Nuer may instead, or as a temporary expedient, sacrifice a small trailing knobbly

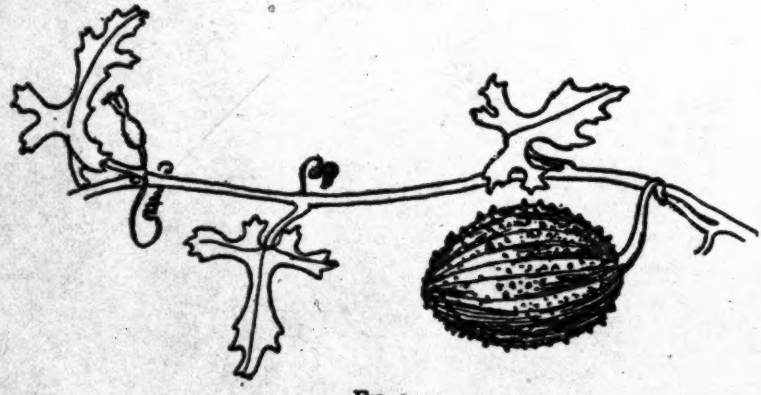

FIG. 3

Cucumis prophetarum (Crowfoot)

cucumber called *kwol*, or *kwol yang*, cow's cucumber (*Cucumis prophetarum*) which grows wild on cultivated sites.[1] If necessary, animal sacrifice is made later, when a victim can be acquired. Nuer also sacrifice this cucumber in minor anxieties, as when they have bad dreams or have committed petty incest. It is treated as though it were an animal victim. It is presented and consecrated, an invocation is said over it, and it is slain by the spear, being cut in half along its edge. The left, or bad, half is then thrown away and the right, or good, half is squeezed and its juice and seeds rubbed on the chest and forehead of the officiant and maybe on others present. This half is afterwards put in the thatch over the entrance to the byre, or sometimes to the dwelling-hut. In cases of petty

[1] I have described it in some earlier accounts as 'a yellow tomato-like fruit'. This is probably the Nuer *kot* (*Solanum incanum*) and not their *kwol* (*Cucumis prophetarum*): *vide* Grace M. Crowfoot, *Flowering Plants of the Northern and Central Sudan*, n.d., Nos. 34 and 129. I am indebted to Dr. Lienhardt for the correction of this unfortunate error.

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seen that in a sense the evil is he, in a certain aspect of the relation of Spirit to man, so, in this sense, it is he who is 'finished with a thing', he who 'goes into the earth' with the blood, he against whom the ox 'shields' man. 782

But though sacrifices made in times of trouble have this basic piacular meaning in common, certain tones in it are emphasized more in some sacrifices than in others, and this is sometimes indicated by some special word being used in reference to the intention. These words lie within the circuit of the general term denoting a piacular offering, *kam*, to give. An examination of them will shed further light on the character of the whole class of piacular sacrifices, and hence on the meaning of sacrifice in general. I speak now only of personal sacrifices, those which have a piacular intention.

When the notion of redemption is strongly marked the word *kuk*, with the verbal form *kok*, seems generally to be used when speaking of the sacrifice and in the invocation made at it. A *kuk kwoth*, sacrifice to God (or to some spirit), appears to be regarded as a ransom which redeems the person who pays it from a misfortune that would, or might, otherwise fall on him. By accepting the gift God enters into a covenant to protect the giver of it or help him in some other way. Through the sacrifice man makes a kind of bargain with his God. 782 789

In violent storms Nuer, fearful of the lightning, throw small pieces of tobacco into the air, asking God to take them, and saying that they have paid him ransom with this offering. When a man in sudden illness or danger takes off a bead or bracelet and throws it away he says 'grandfather [God], take thy cow [bead or bracelet], I have paid thee ransom (*kok*), let my sickness depart'. When an ox is sacrificed there is the idea that the evil goes into the ox and then into the earth with its blood, and there seems to be here the idea of its going into the bead and residing there; for I was once about to pick up a bead I saw lying on the ground in the bush when a Nuer stopped me, saying that it had probably been given to God as an offering by a sick man and if I took it the sickness might enter into me. Likewise, when Nuer sacrifice before crossing a river or wading into a lake to fish, and ask for the protection of the female spirit *buk* against the dangers of the water, they say 'take thy cow, we are ransomed (*kok*)'. In a story of how a girl, Nyanding, was sacrificed to the river which bears her name she

789 is said to have been paid in ransom to the river. The river was
782 bought, as it were, by her sacrifice; just as the hippopotamus had
[538] to buy the river in one of the Nuer just-so stories. Fox had found hippopotamus on land, where he had been created, and exacted from him, in payment for taking him to a river, the flesh around his mouth—which accounts for his funny face today. When they arrived at the river hippopotamus had to pay it (*kok*) the marrow of his leg bones before it would receive him—which accounts for their having no marrow, so Nuer say, in them today. 'Bought' and 'buy' are renderings I discuss below.

782 When in serious sickness an animal is sacrificed Nuer may say
755 *'ca kwoth kok ke yang'*, 'God is paid a cow [in ransom]'. I was present when a Nuer was defending himself against silent disapproval on the part of his family and kinsmen of his frequent sacrifices. He had been given to understand that it was felt that he was destroying the herd from inordinate love of meat. He said that this was not true. The oxen he had killed—and he had killed his own favourite ox among them—had been sacrificed to his mother-in-law's and wife's spirit *deng*, which came from Dinka-land and was frequently troubling his children and his wife and her brother with sickness. It was all very well for his family to say that he had destroyed the herd, but he had killed the cattle for their sakes. It was *'kokene yiekien ke yang'*, 'the ransom of their lives with cattle'. He repeated this phrase many times as one by one he recounted cases of serious sickness in his family and described the ox he had sacrificed on each occasion to placate the spirit *deng*. If his sons saw fit to complain let them regard their sisters. Would they not get the cattle of their sisters' bridewealth? And were not the cattle killed to save their sisters' lives?

782 The word *kuk* would seem therefore to suggest that God, or a
789 spirit, is placed by the sacrifice under an obligation. A woman says 'God, take thy cow and give me a child', and Nuer say of the river-spirit that 'it is given a gift and then it gives life to the people'. The child and the life are given to suppliants in return for the gifts they make. The action of the rite is not effective in itself. God, or a spirit, is not constrained by the sacrifice to grant the favour asked for. An animal sacrificed to God is his animal anyhow, and what he gives the suppliant in return is a *muc*, a free gift. Nevertheless, my impression was, at any rate where spirits of the air and of the earth are concerned, that Nuer feel that the recipient of a sacrifice

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is at fault if it does not fulfil its part of the bargain. A costly sacrifice having been made, *cuong*, right or justice, is on the human side in the matter. Thus the man of whom I was speaking above said during his harangue that after all the sacrifices he had made to the spirit *deng* on account of sickness in his family, his little daughter had been bitten by a snake and died. He had given all these oxen to *deng* and look what had happened! He felt aggrieved and had consulted a prophet of *deng* who had told him that if the spirit had taken his daughter it would compensate him for his loss; and it had indeed done so by giving him twins: '*ca col e kwoth ke cuek*', 'it [the death of the daughter] was compensated by the spirit with twins'. The use of the word *col*, as will be seen later, here implies that the spirit was in debt to the man. This Nuer Job complained that the spirit had only compensated him because he told it that he had had enough of it and that it could take all his children if it pleased, for then he would have finished with it because it would have nothing more to take from him.

The word *kok* occurs in the other Nilotic languages with much the same range of meaning, outside its sacrificial usage, as it has today in Nuer, for one most frequently hears it used today to describe the purchasing of goods from an Arab merchant. That a word which had chiefly, and perhaps primarily, a sacrificial meaning should come to be employed for the recent practice of buying something from a shop, a commercial sense it has also in other Nilotic tongues, sheds some light not only on Nuer ideas about trading but also on their ideas about sacrifice. Since the present range of meaning of the word includes buying and selling one might say that God or a spirit is 'bought' by sacrifice. The dangers of translation that beset one at every step in an attempt to understand and make intelligible Nuer religious ideas are here very apparent, for once we use the word 'bought' the associations it has among ourselves rush in to colour the Nuer conception. But Nuer do not regard purchase from an Arab merchant in the way in which we regard purchase from a shop. It is not to them an impersonal transaction, and they have no idea of price and currency in our sense. Their idea of a purchase is that you give something to a merchant who is thereby put under an obligation to help you. At the same time you ask him for something you need from his shop and he ought to give it to you because, by taking your gift, he has entered into a reciprocal relationship with

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equal value by the persons concerned in the exchange, as when a man who is leaving his neighbourhood exchanges his old byre for a bull calf or when a man exchanges an ox with certain markings desired by his partner to the exchange for one with his own favourite markings. The difference between *kok* and *luel* is that between the reciprocal relation between persons in an exchange and equivalence of objects exchanged. In either case the action is immediate, unlike that implied by use of the words *ngual*, to borrow, and *gwal*, to lend. In loans a man makes a gift and the recipient later returns it or something of greater value. There are two distinct and separate movements between which there is a long passage of time. In its piacular context, therefore, the word *luel* means that the life of the victim is exchanged in the moment of its immolation for the life of a man. In the sacrificial situation the two things are of equal value, so that the one can be substituted for the other. This puts men and cattle in a very peculiar relationship to each other, a matter I discuss in Chapter X.

In personal and piacular sacrifices the animals are substitutions for men. To this extent sacrifice is an exchange, but it is also something very much more than just a simple exchange. It is not a simple idea at all but a very complex one in which many other elements are present. I discuss the problem in more general terms later, but we may here note how other terms are used to describe personal sacrifices which emphasize rather the related ideas of propitiation, expiation, atonement, and purification.

Sometimes the word *lor* is used to describe a sacrifice. The word means 'to go to meet', perhaps its most common usage being to describe the formal greeting that Nuer, especially women, make to a visitor of importance when they go from their homes to receive him outside their homestead or village. The word has therefore the further sense of 'to honour', as would appear to be the case also in Dinka and other Nilotic tongues. But in the religious sense of the word people go out of their villages to meet a plague or other danger not with the purpose of bringing it to their homes to give it hospitality there but with the opposite purpose of preventing it from entering their homes. They go out to meet and stay a plague or murrain with sacrifice. They say '*bane je luor*', 'let us go out to meet it'. The well-known prophet Ngundeng of the Lou tribe did this in times of epidemics, sometimes, I was told, sacrificing dozens of oxen and leaving their carcasses in

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782 a line in the bush. He also used to sacrifice before his followers
●789 as they advanced to battle. His son Gwek appears to have met his
death while making such a sacrifice before a military patrol sent
[726] against him. Mr. Coriat, one of the officers on this patrol, has described how the Nuer attack was launched. 'Two long lines of men rushed out to either flank in an attempt to surround the troops while the main body of Nuer in the centre advaneed more slowly but singing lustily and driving ahead of them a solitary white bull. The order to fire was given. The leading men and the bull reached to within 120 yards of the square before they fell and within a few minutes the whole mass of Nuer were fleeing in all directions. A long pursuit over rough and broken ground followed. Gwek, arrayed in a leather skirt with an iron skewer clutched tight in his hand and a brass pipe, the pipe of Dengkur [Ngundeng], lying beside him, was picked up dead beside the white bull.'[1]

782 789 Other prophets acted in the same manner in epidemics and war. It has also been described to me how a whole section of the eastern Jikany Nuer went out to meet smallpox which was advancing into their territory. They went out to meet it with goats and sheep and pots of beer, and they slaughtered the animals and left their carcasses and the pots of beer in a line over which the smallpox should not cross. It was described to me as being like a *kegh*, a boundary line—more closely in meaning a line a leopard-skin priest makes on the ground before advancing warriors halt them so that a fight may be prevented.

When I was living in a small village on the Sobat river swarms of locusts descended on it and on its gardens, and the people went out to meet (*lor*) them in a body, leading a fawn-coloured goat (roughly the colour of the locusts) and beating their ox-hides, where the gardens adjoined the bush, and there sacrificed the goat. It fell with its head towards the bush. This was regarded as a favourable sign as it was in that direction that the people wanted the locusts to go. They soon departed. The carcass was left where it fell. I have earlier described how people go out to meet durra-birds which are eating their crops and how they make a similar sacrifice and leave the carcass in the bush. Nuer use the same word when speaking of the sacrifices made by kinsmen of twins at their birth. They say '*ba cuek luor*', 'the twins are met [with sacrifice]'.

[1] P. Coriat, 'Gwek, the Witch-Doctor and the Pyramid of Dengkur', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1939, p. 237.

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On those occasions on which Nuer use the word *lor* in a religious context the danger is definite and immediately before them, and it has to be met with sacrifice to propitiate God so that of his kindness he may stay its approach. It is true that they speak of going out to meet the smallpox, the locusts, the durra-birds, or whatever the threatening thing may be, but when they say that they 'meet it with a cow', that is, by sacrifice, we are to understand that the 'it' is not the thing itself but Spirit manifested in the thing. It is a vehicle of Spirit and only God can stay it. We have then in the concept of *luor* another element in sacrificial intention, homage to God by a whole community, or on its behalf, at a time of common crisis.

The word *kier*, with the verbal form *kir*, is more difficult to translate than the other words used for sacrifice because it has no meaning outside its sacrificial usage. I have translated it by 'expiation' because that idea together with the idea of purification seem to me to be strongly represented in the situations of its use, the appeasement of God or spirits when an event which places people in a state of danger, usually grave, has taken place. The danger, which is Spirit itself, is not merely possible, nor is it seen to be approaching. It is already present and people must rid themselves of it before it injures them or causes them further injury.

Nuer say of a spirit which has made a man seriously ill *'ba kwoth kier ke del'*, 'expiation is made to the spirit with one of the flock'. They say of the sacrifice made after the burial of a man that *'ba kier piny ke del'*, '[the dead man] is expiated in the earth with one of the flock'. They say of a byre which has been struck by lightning that *'ca kir ke ghok'*, 'it has been expiated with cattle', and of a man killed by lightning that *'ca je kir ke det kene ruath'*, 'he was expiated with some of the flock and with oxen'. When a speckled vulture settled on a man's head (pp. 88–89) expiation was made (*ca kir*) by sacrifice. I have also heard it said of sacrifices made on account of the birth of twins *'ca ke kir'* 'they [the twins] have been expiated'. One does not visit the home of a kinsman who has begotten twins without something to sacrifice in one's hands. Further examples of the use of the word *kier* for sacrifices are given by Father Kiggen, on account of a man being lost and on account of a bad dream.[1]

It may seem a peculiar expression to speak of a man, twins, and

[1] Op. cit., p. 145.

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to refer to other persons with traditional ritual functions, such as the *wut ghok* or man of the cattle, though this usage is loose and should perhaps be regarded as derived by analogy from its primary use to denote a leopard-skin priest. When the Government chose certain leading persons in the various Nuer communities and appointed them 'Government Chiefs' with administrative and judicial duties and privileges these chiefs became known as *kuar biei*, chiefs of the cloth (the robes of office presented to them by the Government), either because Europeans referred to them as *kuar* or because Nuer saw a resemblance between the robes and the leopard-skins worn by priests. Both are worn over the right shoulder. *Kuaar* became as well the title by which Europeans are addressed by Nuer, perhaps for one or other of the same reasons. The word has thus gained a wider range of meaning.

A more usual title than *kuaar twac* or *gwan twac* is *kuaar muon*, priest of the earth, the word *mun* (gen. *muon*) meaning 'earth' in the sense of 'soil'; and if it were not that in the literature on the Nuer the priest of whom we speak is always designated by reference to his leopard-skin I should be inclined to write of him as the priest of the earth, because the leopard-skin title is taken only from his badge whereas the earth title is derived from a symbolic association with the earth of deeper significance. It is said that a leopard-skin priest (henceforward generally referred to simply as 'priest') will not approach people when they are making pots lest the pots crack; and in this sense he may be said to respect (*thek*) the earth. If anything goes wrong with the standing crops he may be asked to anoint (*yir*) the earth with butter. He may also be asked to anoint seed and digging-sticks with butter before sowing. When a priest is buried, his corpse, so that it will not be in contact with the earth, is placed between hides on a light platform erected in the grave, which is dug in his hut if he dies while the people are in their villages. These and other observances express a mystical relationship of priests with the earth in virtue of which their curses are thought to have special potency, for, as was noted earlier (p. 167), they can affect not only a man's crops but his welfare generally, since human activities all take place on the earth. However, in spite of the power attributed to their curses, I have never known Nuer stand in awe of them nor have I known the power to be used outside a situation of feud; and then a priest's threat to curse is regarded as a routine convention. It gives the

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793 [789] injured party an excuse to accept compensation without loss of honour.

It is a matter of surprise that the Nuer priesthood should have this association with the earth and take its most common title from it. There is no cult of the earth such as we find in West Africa. Priests are not traditionally linked to a particular territory as are the 'fathers of the land', ritual agents who are such in virtue of being descendants of first settlers, among some other Nilotic peoples. Nor can a satisfactory explanation be advanced in terms of agricultural activities. Nuer do not highly esteem cultivation of crops and may be presumed to have engaged in it even less in the past when cattle were more numerous. Cattle husbandry receives more of their attention and is their absorbing interest, but it and fishing, which is also most important for them, so far as they are the object of ritual attention, are the concern of other, and less important, ritual specialists than the priest of the earth. Moreover, Nuer do not attach much importance to such ritual as he performs in connexion with the crops, and it is entirely secondary to his other functions. On the other hand, it can be seen that the association of priesthood with the earth is a representation which accords with the general idea of man being identified with the earth and God with the sky, the priest being essentially a person who sacrifices on behalf of man below to God above.

793 613 614 Lineages of leopard-skin priests are found in all tribal sections, and in most parts of Nuerland they are in the category of *rul*, strangers, and not of *diel*, members of the clans which own the tribal territories. It is necessary that they should be widely spread, because their services are essential to Nuer everywhere, and it is significant that they are generally not members of lineages identified with political groups, because they have to act as peacemakers between such groups. The two best-known priestly clans, the Gaatleak and the Jimem, have no tribal territories of their own but live, as families and small lineages, in most or all territories owned by other clans. They are like Levi, divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. Their priestly filiation goes back to Gee, the first man and the first priest, from certain of whose sons the priestly virtue (*ring*) has passed down the generations. However, although their powers are hereditary, and although all members of a priestly lineage can, therefore, act in a priestly capacity, in practice only certain families do so, and these families can function as priests wherever

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793 the victim, a sheep: 'now, sheep, thy blood is shed to death on
695 account of the man who is at fault'. He then calls on God: 'O God of heaven, God of our fathers, God who created all things, God of the universe, God of the flesh (*ring*), I call on thee to look upon these persons, that the man who is at fault may die. Now, I know that thou, O God, listenest to my speech (*rietda*).' If a guilty man who has taken an oath that he is innocent falls sick he gets the priest to sacrifice for him and give him medicines, promising reparation for the wrong he has done.

793 A leopard-skin priest is also, at any rate usually, called in to
782 sacrifice an ox if close relations commit incest. In cases of slighter
835 incest, between, that is, persons more distantly related, some lesser specialist, a diviner, or just the head of the family, performs the sacrifice, or the man who has committed incest himself sacrifices a cucumber or cuts in two the fruit of a sausage-tree. The priest consecrates the ox, makes an invocation over it to God that he may spare the partners to the sin and that the offence may depart with the blood of the victim. The beast is then held down on the ground and the priest inserts the point of his spear in its throat and cuts towards the breast. He severs the beast in twain, hacking its head in two with an axe. As he makes the final cuts the parties to the offence tug at the carcass on either side and pull it apart. One half is eaten by the priest and his friends and the other by the relatives of the principals, the principals themselves abstaining. The priest squeezes out the gall from the victim's gall-bladder into water in a gourd, adds *wal ruali*, incest-medicine, and the principals and their relatives drink this mixture.

793 Sacrifices in connexion with homicide, ordeals, and, at least
782 usually, serious incest are the exclusive domain of the leopard-skin priest. If he is called on to make sacrifice on other occasions it is because it is felt that his doing so adds weight to the intention; but it is not necessary that he should act and unless he happens to be a neighbour it is unlikely that he would be summoned.

[793] Since a good deal has been written about the importance of
●789 'rain-makers' in this part of Africa it is perhaps wise to note also that the leopard-skin priest is never spoken about in relation to rain. When questioned, Nuer say that he might be asked to sacrifice for rain and to perform some other and minor ritual acts, such as putting a hyena's skull in water, to the same purpose; but they make it clear that they attach no great importance to these pro-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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cedures. Any Nuer can pray to God to send rain, and his prayers may be supported by placing a sprig of the *nyuot* tree in water, though this is best done, together with sacrifice of one of the flock to *kwoth nyota*, spirit of the *nyuot* tree, by a member of the widely scattered Gaawar clan on account of their association with both rain and the tree (p. 72). Some Nuer said that a prophet's prayers and sacrifices for rain might be effective, and they seem to have had some faith in those of the prophet Gwek; but I found that in general Nuer showed little interest in the subject. They certainly do not think that anyone can 'make' rain. Whoever it may be, priest, prophet, member of the Gaawar clan, or just an ordinary person, he can only pray to God to send the rain. They say, 'There is nothing we can do if it does not rain. God has given us nothing [to make it]. We are merely ignorant folk.' When I urged that surely there was something they could do, a Nuer replied, 'Oh well, the leopard-skin priest may sacrifice a cow [probably a goat was meant] and pray to God for rain, and that is all; perhaps God will give it and perhaps he won't.' When I asked about Car, a well-known prophet, whether he could bring rain, I was told, 'Oh well, he will pray to his spirit [an air-spirit] and ask for rain, but that is all.'

In whatever circumstances a priest acts as intermediary between men and God the virtue which gives efficacy to his mediation resides in his office rather than in himself. Consequently, it does not matter what sort of person he is, socially, psychologically, or morally. The virtue derives from the office having been established by God at the beginning of things as part of the social order. Consequently the priest is a traditional public functionary thought of as having always existed and as representative of man, rather than of any particular men, to God in certain critical situations. Therefore when he invokes God at sacrifice he does so in phrases which recall the universal and enduring character of his role: '*Kwoth muonda*', 'Spirit of our earth', '*Kwoth Jagei*', 'Spirit of all the Nuer' (*Jagei* has here this sense), and '*Kwoth rieng gwari*', 'Spirit of the virtue of our fathers'.

When we examine the critical situations in which the priest is called upon to exercise his functions we see that the priesthood can be regarded either as a political institution functioning within a set of religious ideas and values or as a religious institution functioning within a set of political ideas and values. His essential and